

# Landscapes: the Journal of the International Centre for Landscape and Language

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Volume 2 | Issue 3

Article 10

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2013

## Ornithology #1

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### Recommended Citation

Schalliol, J. (2004). Ornithology #1. *Landscapes: the Journal of the International Centre for Landscape and Language*, 2(3). Retrieved from <http://ro.ecu.edu.au/landscapes/vol2/iss3/10>

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<http://ro.ecu.edu.au/landscapes/vol2/iss3/10>

## JENNIFER SCHALLIOL

### Ornithology #1

Are birds every spring half-starved?  
Is hunger just the seasonal  
usual to them, the norm:

you go on down to Florida  
or thereabouts, you get the sign,  
the signal, and off you go

back to Ohio, Illinois,  
Wisconsin, and oops,  
it's actually still snowing,

the ground is frozen, and worms -- well,  
they're a ways off yet -  
so is this just the typical?

Is there a reason why they don't  
lollygag in the South longer?  
Maybe people feed them too much

like the pigeons at Navy Pier,  
incapacitated solely  
via instinct, and provision,

so these vacationing Yank birds,  
I suppose they suspect they'll grow  
fat and unable to fly, so

off back here they come  
to starve,  
to survive.

### Still Life with Twister

A six-mile swath – must it always  
be a swath? A scythe. Arbitrary.  
Picture an unwound scroll,  
twisted over itself here and there,  
dangling to an end somewhere  
x minutes later on a road map.

County names in black, generic  
font, slight sheen, and back-

ground of that watercolor  
yellow.

Sharpen the focus to splinters  
of trees  
of sides  
of houses snapped in half,  
garages sliced cleanly and removed,  
shingles sliding neatly down,  
the furniture within standing  
still poised, tea-time get-up,  
untouched look.  
circling,

(National Guard in camouflage, Red Cross vans

the floor, a goldenrod linoleum,  
now white, covered in this sheer  
dust – from where?

handing out Ford-donated gloves for our  
Tasks Ahead, doughnuts and coffee  
and Gatorade in the mornings,  
salad and spaghetti and bread at noon,  
a man in boots who stomped through each  
now-borderless yard to tell us to come eat)

clumps of pet fur float listlessly over  
too, sucked from beneath  
the fridge and oven  
still

(three mornings after now and State Farm

hasn't shown)

the digital is out.  
it is No Time.  
the air is duller  
and fluctuates less  
about the ears.  
there are little boys' toys  
in our yard that my mother  
can't wash and give to her  
granddaughter,  
trees,  
she jokes, crying minutes  
before  
yuk...)

(plus innumerable scraps of roof, drywall (now  
wet and crumbled), insulation, bird's eggs, pale  
wash of blue, brown speckled under caked debris,  
next to the stumps, under halved pine

(seven of the eight trees down in back, counting rings:  
32 years old. "same age as you, Mom!" yuk

and after  
too, trees impaling  
debris,  
the neighbors' house,  
quiet.  
(where the twins we babysat  
used to live),  
garages and kitchens  
entirely absent.

(morning to afternoons spent picking up this

robins sitting on the stumps,

eggs next to stumps, under halved trees,  
by the former-fence rubble, in the middle  
of the yard.

"I found a bird wing!"

most absent: all  
the trees.

"Oh...

I found a whole bird."

My sister instructing me to put the eggs by the  
upside-down nest under the standing pine. She'll bury them later

—

only don't turn the nest over.

The male starling sitting all day in the apple tree  
under which we had found his mate that morning  
(he sat there the next two days, too)

And the landscape, the silhouette is so changed  
I don't recognize the photos taken in our backyard, of my niece,  
when my mother shows them to me now,  
and every time we drive home I forget to retrain my eyes  
until I see the treeline go.

**Jennifer Schalliol** is currently pursuing an MFA in Writing at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She has had poems accepted in the journals *Salt* and *Ink*. She recently published a chapbook, *Means of Access*, through the Kenyon Review Chapbook Series, and is working on her first book.